

February 14, 2017

Dear Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and members of the Committee,

I am Nicole Wagner, President and CEO of LambdaVision, a University of Connecticut spinoff company developing a protein-based retinal implant to restore vision to the millions of patients blinded by macular degeneration and retinitis pigmentosa. I received both my bachelor's degree (2007) and PhD (2013) from UConn, and currently serve as an Assistant Research Professor in the Department of Chemistry at Storrs. I am a resident of West Hartford.

Thank you for all of your incredible support for the University of Connecticut Health Center. Through the state investment in UConn Health, from Bioscience CT to your regular investments in our Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine, you have made it a great university that is making a real difference to our State and to UConn students --- 70% of whom are from Connecticut.

The recommended budget released last week represents a significant gap between the state funding and what is needed to operate UConn Health next year. These deep cuts would reverse the progress made at UConn Health and would have a significant impact on the quality of training and care that are so vital to students of medicine, patients and families, and the broader state-wide community. As an entrepreneur focused on medical devices, I also fear that these cuts will negatively impact the work that we are doing at LambdaVision to restore vision to patients with devastating blinding diseases of the eye. Moreover, I worry that these cuts will eliminate some of the essential programming and support that the startup companies are receiving through the University of Connecticut TIP program, including access to Entrepreneurs in Residence, mentors, interns, and programming to help entrepreneurs succeed in the path to commercialization. The promising technologies being developed in the TIP space represent the next generation of innovative therapies and treatments, and these technologies rely on Connecticut's resources to propel research and development and commercialization.

Having spent the last 14 years in various roles at UConn, I am passionate about education, innovation, and job creation. My husband will be graduating this year with his MD/PhD from UConn Medical School, and is hoping to secure a residency spot at UConn. We have both benefited from the many opportunities that UConn has provided us, including excellent undergraduate and graduate training, and I fear that cutting the resources to these programs will negatively impact the quality of training that students are receiving. When shortcuts are taken in preparing new physicians and researchers for their careers in medicine and science, we only hinder the potential of these individuals to lead, innovate, and heal the world's leading health problems.

UConn has always taken pride in fostering innovation and, as an entrepreneur and a scientist, I am concerned that the budget cuts will be harmful to my ability to build a company in the state. Moreover, I fear that these cuts may cause many talented PhD and postdoctoral students to look at programs outside of the State, which can make it challenging for UConn faculty/startups to conduct the cutting edge research that we pride ourselves on. I also fear that we will lose valuable programs that are helping startups and entrepreneurs bridge the gap to venture funding.

Thank you for your ongoing support of UConn Health. I urge you to find a way to restore these funds so that UConn Health can continue to provide the important benefits to Connecticut's students, patients, and economy.

Sincerely,
Nicole Wagner